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The work of school improvement league and suggestions for the future.

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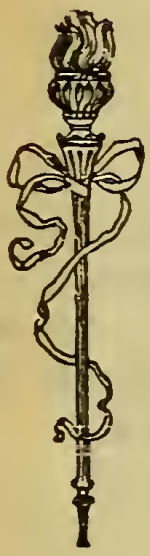
The Work of School Improvement League and Suggestions for the Future



State of Maine
Educational Department

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Augusta, Maine.

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The Work of the School Improvement Leagues of Maine.

1. The Leagues have developed higher standards.

The School Improvement Leagues have been organized in more than a thousand Maine communities. They have emphasized in each of these the fact that the local school is entitled to the best physical surroundings, to a good working equipment of books and apparatus and to an attractive schoolroom.

2. The Leagues have brought the home and the school nearer to each other.

The Leagues stand for the idea that education concerns both the home and the school. They have sought to join these two in educational endeavor. They have succeeded. Wherever you find a league there you will find the teacher, the parent and the pupil acting together for the improvement of school conditions. As a result, in these communities there is a better understanding of the school on the part of the parents and a more sympathetic

interest in the home on the part of the teacher. These are the conditions which will make our educational institutions equal to their important tasks.

3. The Leagues have developed a sense of responsibility.

Modern school children have been in danger of losing the appreciation of the value of personal responsibility. Boys and girls must be taught to help themselves. In this way only can they become self-reliant men and women. The Leagues have led the pupils of the schools to accomplish things through their own efforts. They have taught the value of improvements. They have fostered a care for public property. They have increased loyalty to the local school. They have made education seem more desirable because they have helped to show its cost.

4. The Leagues have increased school attendance.

In order that one may become actively interested in any enterprise he must be set at work for that enterprise. The Leagues have shown the pupils ways in which they can work for their schools. This has engendered loyalty and interest. The attendance in Maine schools has recently shown a most remarkable growth both in numbers and

regularity. There can be no question but that this is due in part to the increased interest in the schools felt both by pupils and their parents. It is a beneficent result of the closer harmony that is springing up between the school and the home.

5. The Leagues have magnified the common school.

The common school stands as the foundation of all educational institutions. In Maine it has had an illustrious career. Our fathers made sacrifices to establish it. Many men of worth attribute to it their success. The common people rightly regard it as their most valued possession. The Leagues have worked largely in the common school. They have sought to improve the quality of its work. They have enlarged its importance in the minds of pupils and people. They seek to keep it alive and prosperous. They have quickened the interest of pupils and they have brought the attention of parents and citizens to its needs and claims. They have made it a stronger and more efficient instrumentality.

6. The Leagues have transformed bare, unattractive places of drudgery into rooms with homelike conditions.

A child loves pleasant surroundings.

No child should be placed in a dreary, depressing environment. The average school child spends six hours of each school day in the schoolroom. This room should be cheery and attractive. It should not be furnished in a costly, luxurious manner, but should prove that simplicity and beauty may be had without extravagance. The Leagues have curtained windows; they have tinted smoky walls; they have freshened old furniture and they have cleaned untidy floors. They have hung pictures; they have provided stands for books, flowers and ornaments. These things have made the schoolrooms homelike and pleasant. Children have found their school days brighter because of these blessings. School has meant more to these children and they have enjoyed these things more because they had the joy and satisfaction of helping to provide them.

7. The Leagues have improved school grounds.

No one likes to see a house surrounded with untidy grounds. No matter how fine the house it cannot appear beautiful under these conditions. The impression is that the inhabitants of such a house must of neces-

sity be uncultured. Many schoolhouses have forlorn surroundings. Unsightly stumps and rocks cumber the grounds. Rickety fences surround them. Outhouses loom up gaunt and indecorous. Hollow places collect pools in wet weather and paths are slimy and offensive. No trees or shrubs afford protection from the sun, or lend their beauty to the scene.

Against conditions like these the Leagues have waged relentless warfare. The result has been that lawns have been laid out, gardens have been planted, trees and shrubs have been set, gravel paths have been constructed, hollows have been filled, outhouses have been screened and places hitherto forlorn and repulsive have been transformed into things of beauty.

In this work civic clubs, granges and women's organizations have aided. The press of the State has given its help. Magazines of national circulation, as The Youth's Companion, the Review of Reviews and others, have taken up and advocated this work throughout the entire country.

8. The Leagues have furnished libraries.

In schools of all classes, but particularly in country schools, the Leagues

have done a work of great value in supplying school libraries. In scores of instances these libraries have become, in effect, the public and circulating libraries for adults as well as for children. The Leagues themselves have purchased about a hundred thousand volumes for their libraries. They have likewise been the medium for distributing the benefits of the traveling libraries provided by the State.

Summary,—What the Leagues have done.

A. Material Results.

1. Planted over five thousand trees.
2. Purchased a hundred thousand books.
3. Purchased over five hundred casts.
4. Purchased about seven thousand pictures.

Miscellaneous improvements impossible to enumerate, for example: Graded grounds, tinted schoolroom walls, purchased flags, clocks, organs, maps, charts, window shades and school apparatus.

B. Other Important Results.

1. They have created a higher standard of school equipment.

2. They have strengthened the harmony between school and home.
3. They have emphasized self-help.
4. They have increased the usefulness of the common school.
5. They have made school life more attractive to youth.
6. They have cultivated civic pride.
7. They have encouraged a taste for good literature.

What of the Future?

This pamphlet will reach teachers in season to be suggestive of the special opportunities offered for spring work. It is sent to three classes of teachers with a special word to each.

1. To those teachers who have already organized Leagues:

The importance and value of League work has already been demonstrated by you. Many things will occur to you that still remain undone for your school. Outline a definite plan for the accomplishment of one or more of these and with your reorganized League, at the beginning of a new term, give its members the inspiration of a new task.

2. To those teachers who find themselves in schools where Leagues have formerly existed:

The farther improvement in your school will depend largely on you, since leadership in these matters is usually and wisely left ot the teacher. The responsibility is all the greater since it rests with you to determine whether the work favorably begun shall reach its fulfilment under your direction. Ascertain what your League has already done. If there have been mistakes seek to correct them. Make plans for some new work and these will bring fresh zeal to the members. You will find full information relative to the methods of the League in the pamphlets named elsewhere.

3. To those teachers who find themselves in schools where no Leagues have ever been organized:

A special opportunity is yours. You have the experience of others as a guide. You have a fine field in which to begin work. Secure the pamphlets elsewhere referred to and begin work at once. Call the attention of the superintendent and people of your community to your plans.

To all teachers who are interested in school improvement the suggestion is

made that you secure from the State Educational Department the following publications:

1. Library and Art Exchange.
2. Manual on organizing Leagues.
3. Evidences of Improvement and Work of Leagues.
4. Improvement of School Buildings and Grounds.

The Youth's Companion, Boston, Mass., will send free of charge valuable aids to teachers who plan school yard improvements.

Send to Miss Kate MacDonald, Machias, Me., for a League Charter application blank.

It is very important that each League should send to the local paper and to the State Secretary a record of its work.

The success of the League does not depend on the kind or grade of school. It will be successful under an enterprising teacher in any school that needs improvement.

The adaptability of the League to varying circumstances can hardly be more vividly illustrated than by the following reports. The first is written by the teacher of a small school in the Maine wilderness. The second is an

extract from the 1905 town report of one of the largest, wealthiest, and most populous towns of the State. In these and in schools of all intermediate classes successful Leagues have been conducted.

Report I. "This league was organized on the 25th of last June. We began with twenty-five members, all of the school, and now have forty-four, all of whom are greatly interested in the work. This place is located at the mouth of the —— river, on the west shore of ———— lake and has eighteen dwellings and a number of sporting camps. The population is about ninety, with thirty children of school age.

The schoolhouse is upon the bank of the river, is of logs placed upright and is unfinished. The school is supported by the State and this is the fourth year of its existence. Since the organization of the league the walls of the schoolroom have been papered, pictures have been contributed, two new school desks put in, a second floor of matched boards put down and we have ordered some curtains and a picture frame. Five large, black, pine stumps (one eighteen feet high and six in diameter), several loads of rocks and a thick

fringe of scrubby bushes have been removed from the yard, affording us a full view of the river, which is the public highway used by hundreds of sporting people. We trust maple shade trees and flower beds will follow. A flag has been secured and at the raising we had a supper from which we raised a goodly sum.

Instruction in civic duties is a part of our league work, thus preparing us for the time when this will be an organized plantation."

Report li. "Each successive year the work of the School Improvement League holds the attention and interest of the teachers and pupils. The reports sent to me from the secretaries of the various leagues have been very satisfactory, showing certainly that the members are alive to the interests and duties of the organization. In some of the schools considerable money has been raised during the year the largest amount, thirty dollars, having been collected by the Central school. Each League in the town has added quite materially to the improvement of the room by the purchase of pictures or of books. When we realize that the volumes already purchased

by the leagues number several hundreds and that these books are the best that the age affords, we cannot fail to see that the work of the league has quite a potent influence over the life of the child. It is noticeable in all the rooms that the best books of the collection show marks of constant use, and often I find some boy or girl who has read the same volume several times.

In this way the children learn to know and love the good things in literature, and thus is laid the foundation for the imbibing of the best writings of our more advanced books. Another influence nearly equal to the influence of good books is that of good surroundings.

The work of the league during the year in changing the physical conditions of the schoolroom has ranged all the way from the blacking of the stove to the adorning of the walls with pictures. In this connection it seems not out of place to call your attention to the following statement made by one of our leading educational authorities. "There is scarcely a sounder principle in pedagogy than that care begets care; order, order; cleanliness, cleanliness; and beauty, beauty. Things conspicu-

cusly good command the respect of children, invite their imitation, and in ways real, though obscure, sink into their souls and mould their being. The power of good example in men and women no one disputes, but there is power akin to it in things, provided they embody the better thoughts of men and women."

For further information on matters discussed in this document please apply to

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